

more specific supervisory attributes, such as the ability to organize and coordinate work efficiently, set priorities, and motivate others. Increasingly, supervisors need a broad base of office skills coupled with personal flexibility to adapt to changes in organizational structure and move among departments when necessary.

In addition, supervisors must pay close attention to detail in order to identify and correct errors made by the staff they oversee. Good working knowledge of the organization's computer system is also an advantage. Many employers require postsecondary training—in some cases, an associate's or even a bachelor's degree.

A clerk with potential supervisory abilities may be given occasional supervisory assignments. To prepare for full-time supervisory duties, he or she may attend in-house training or take courses in time management or interpersonal relations.

Some office and administrative support supervisor positions are filled with people from outside the organization. These positions may serve as entry-level training for potential higher-level managers. New college graduates may rotate through departments of an organization at this level to learn the work of the organization.

Job Outlook

Like other supervisory occupations, applicants for office and administrative support supervisor or manager jobs are likely to encounter keen competition because the number of applicants should greatly exceed the number of job openings. Employment of office and administrative support supervisors and managers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2008. In addition to the job openings arising from growth, a larger number of openings will stem from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave this large occupation for other reasons.

Employment of office and administrative support supervisors is primarily affected by the demand for clerical workers. Despite an increasing amount of clerical work, the spread of office automation should allow a wider variety of tasks to be performed by fewer office and administrative support workers. This will cause employment in some clerical occupations to slow or even decline, leading supervisors to have smaller staffs and perform more professional tasks. However, office and administrative support managers still will be needed to coordinate the increasing amount of clerical work and make sure the technology is applied and running properly. In addition, organizational restructuring continues to reduce some middle management positions, distributing more responsibility to office and administrative support supervisors. This added responsibility combined with relatively higher skills and longer tenure will place office and administrative support supervisors and managers among the clerical workers most likely to retain their jobs.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of full-time office and administrative support supervisors were \$31,090 in 1998; the middle 50 percent earned between \$23,950 and \$40,250. The lowest paid 10 percent earned less than \$19,060, while the highest paid 10 percent earned more than \$52,570. In 1997, median earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of office and administrative support supervisors were:

Federal government	\$49,200
Local government, except education and hospitals	30,600
Hospitals	29,700
Offices and clinics of medical doctors	29,200
Commercial banks	27,400

In addition to typical benefits, some office and administrative support supervisors in the private sector may receive additional compensation in the form of bonuses and stock options.

Related Occupations

Office and administrative support supervisors and managers must understand and sometimes perform the work of the people whom they oversee, including accounting clerks, cashiers, bank tellers, and tele-

phone operators. Their supervisory and administrative duties are similar to those of other supervisors and managers.

Sources of Additional Information

For a wide variety of information related to management occupations, including educational programs, contact:

- ☛ American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019-7420. Internet: <http://www.amanet.org>
- ☛ National Management Association, 2210 Arbor Blvd., Dayton, OH 45439. Internet: <http://www.nma1.org>

Office Clerks, General

(O*NET 55347)

Significant Points

- Although most jobs are entry level, previous office or business experience may be required for some positions.
- Plentiful job opportunities should stem from employment growth, the large size of the occupation, and turnover.

Nature of the Work

Rather than performing a single specialized task, the daily responsibilities of a general office clerk change with the needs of the specific jobs and the employer. Whereas some clerks spend their days filing or typing, others enter data at a computer terminal. They can also be called upon to operate photocopiers, fax machines, and other office equipment; prepare mailings; proofread copies; and answer telephones and deliver messages.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk vary significantly, depending upon the type of office in which a clerk works. An office clerk in a doctor's office, for example, would not perform the same tasks as a clerk in a large financial institution or in the office of an auto parts wholesaler. Although they may sort checks, keep payroll records, take inventory, and access information, clerks also perform duties unique to their employer, such as organizing medications, making transparencies for a presentation, or filling orders received by fax machine.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk also vary by level of experience. Whereas inexperienced employees make photocopies, stuff envelopes, or record inquiries, experienced clerks are usually given additional responsibilities. For example, they may maintain financial or



General office clerks hold over 3 million jobs.

other records, verify statistical reports for accuracy and completeness, handle and adjust customer complaints, make travel arrangements, take inventory of equipment and supplies, answer questions on departmental services and functions, or help prepare invoices or budgetary requests. Senior office clerks may be expected to monitor and direct the work of lower level clerks.

Working Conditions

For the most part, working conditions for office clerks are the same as those for other office employees within the same company. Those on a full-time schedule usually work a standard 40-hour week; however, some work shifts or overtime during busy periods. About 1 in 3 works part-time, whereas many other office clerks work as temporary workers.

Employment

Office clerks held about 3,021,000 jobs in 1998. Most are employed in relatively small businesses. Although they work in every sector of the economy, almost 60 percent worked in the services or wholesale and retail trade industries.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Although most office clerk jobs are entry level administrative support positions, some previous office or business experience may be needed. Employers usually require a high school diploma, and some require typing, basic computer skills, and other general office skills. Familiarity with computer word processing software and applications is becoming increasingly important.

Training for this occupation is available through business education programs offered in high schools, community and junior colleges, and postsecondary vocational schools. Courses in word processing, other computer applications, and office practices are particularly helpful.

Because office clerks usually work with other office staff, they should be cooperative and able to work as part of a team. In addition, they should have good communication skills, be detail-oriented, and adaptable.

General office clerks who exhibit strong communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills may be promoted to supervisory positions. Others may move into different, more senior clerical or administrative jobs, such as receptionist, secretary, and administrative assistant. After gaining some work experience or specialized skills, many workers transfer to jobs with higher pay or greater advancement potential. Advancement to professional occupations within an establishment normally requires additional formal education, such as a college degree.

Job Outlook

Plentiful job opportunities are expected for general office clerks due to employment growth, the large size of the occupation, and turnover. Furthermore, growth in part-time and temporary clerical positions will lead to a large number of job openings. Prospects should be brightest for those who have knowledge of basic computer applications and office machinery, such as fax machines and copiers.

Employment of general office clerks is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2008. The employment outlook for office clerks will be affected by the increasing use of computers, expanding office automation, and the consolidation of clerical tasks. Automation has led to productivity gains, allowing a wide variety of duties to be performed by few office workers. However, automation also has led to a consolidation of clerical staffs and a diversification of job responsibilities. This consolidation increases the demand for general office clerks, because they perform a variety of clerical tasks. It will become increasingly common within small businesses to find a single general office clerk in charge of all clerical work.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of full-time office clerks were \$19,580 in 1998; the middle 50 percent earned between \$15,210 and \$24,370 annually.

Ten percent earned less than \$12,570, and 10 percent more than \$30,740. Median annual salaries in the industries employing the largest number of office clerks in 1997 are shown below:

Local government, except education and hospitals	\$20,300
State government, except education and hospitals	20,100
Hospitals	19,400
Colleges and universities	18,600
Personnel supply services	16,700

In early 1999, the Federal Government paid office clerks a starting salary of between \$13,400 and \$18,400 a year, depending on education and experience. Office clerks employed by the Federal Government earned an average annual salary of about \$28,100 in 1999.

Related Occupations

The duties of office clerks can include a combination of bookkeeping, typing, office machine operation, and filing; other administrative support workers who perform similar duties include information clerks and records processing clerks. Nonclerical entry-level jobs include cashier, medical assistant, teacher aide, and food and beverage service worker.

Sources of Additional Information

State employment service offices and agencies can provide information about job openings for general office clerks.

Postal Clerks and Mail Carriers

(O*NET 57305, 57308, and 58028)

Significant Points

- Relatively few people become postal clerks or mail carriers as their first jobs.
- Qualification is based on an examination.
- Because of the large number of qualified applicants, keen competition is expected.

Nature of the Work

Each week, the U.S. Postal Service delivers billions of pieces of mail, including letters, bills, advertisements, and packages. To do this in an efficient and timely manner, the Postal Service employs about 900,000 individuals, almost two-thirds of whom are postal clerks or mail carriers. Postal clerks wait on customers and ensure that mail is properly collected, sorted, and paid for, whereas mail carriers deliver mail to urban and rural residences and businesses throughout the United States.

Postal clerks, who are typically classified by job duties, perform a variety of functions in the Nation's post offices. Those who work as window or counter clerks, for example, sell stamps, money orders, postal stationery, and mailing envelopes and boxes. They also weigh packages to determine postage and check that packages are in satisfactory condition for mailing. These clerks register, certify, and insure mail and answer questions about postage rates, post office boxes, mailing restrictions, and other postal matters. Window and counter clerks also help customers file claims for damaged packages.

Postal clerks known as distribution clerks sort local mail for delivery to individual customers. A growing proportion of distribution clerks are known as mail processors and operate optical character readers (OCRs) and bar code sorters to arrange mail according to destination. OCRs "read" the ZIP code and spray a bar code onto the mail. Bar code sorters then scan the code and sort the mail. Because this is significantly faster than older sorting methods, it is becoming the standard sorting technology in mail processing centers.

Nevertheless, a number of distribution clerks still operate old electronic letter-sorting machines in some locations. These clerks push keys corresponding to the ZIP code of the local post office to